
Editorials

REMEMBER THE PUZZLE

Some people love to do jigsaw puzzles and will spend hours — even days — on intricate ones. Everyone knows when they do a puzzle that they must have patience and persistence, and it will not be complete until the last piece is in place.

The Bible indicates that Christian growth is just like that and the last pieces will not be put into place until God Himself places them and we are given new glorified bodies (Romans 8:22-23). Resurrection with perfect bodies in a perfect environment is the very last piece of the puzzle. However, we are adding the other pieces all through life.

In Charles Spurgeon's *Morning by Morning*, the devotional for January 27 spoke of heaven in this way: "Then shall we know, and taste, and feel the happiness of this vast but short sentence, 'Complete in Christ.' Not till then shall we fully comprehend the heights and depths of the salvation of Jesus." In our dark times it is good to remember, "not till then."

Life is certainly more akin to the conventional method of photography than that of digital photography with its quick-snap results. Life's picture and its final outcome takes a long time to complete. Growth is life-long. No one thinks of an elaborate puzzle made up of only a handful of pieces. Neither should anyone think the Christian life can be developed by one fad, one program, one conference, or one revival.

Yes, life is like a puzzle — only more complex. There is no box lid with its final picture — except the sure knowledge of resurrection when death will be reversed and there will be some affinity to the resurrected body of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15, 1 John 3:1-3). From here to resurrection is the complicated part. Just how and where life's puzzle pieces all fit is worked out over time. We know one piece is only one piece and not the whole puzzle. How often we have heard from the extremists on the Charismatic fringe, "This is the year of the Lord, the year of Jubilee." Life's puzzle takes more than one year or even one decade. Claims there will always be, but those making the claims have yet to demonstrate the goods.

Some utopians and triumphalists throw pieces of the puzzle in where they don't belong, creating distorted pictures, and even rush to make the puzzle appear finished when it is really botched up. In reality, the last few pieces can only be placed in at resurrection.

One of the favorite con games of Charismatic extremists is "Name the Year." Shortly before his death, Kenneth Hagin got the ball rolling for 2004 with a "prophecy" delivered during his Winter Bible Seminar in February 2003: "But 2004 - what about 2004? Two thousand four will be a year for more." More what? According to Hagin, "more power, more glory, more manifestation, more saved, more filled with the Spirit, more healed!" (e-mail advertisement for Winter Bible

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Seminar 2004). If there were the hundreds being healed at each meeting as Oral Roberts, Kathryn Kuhlman, Benny Hinn, and others have claimed since the 1940s, there would be millions verifiably well.

Paula White added to the silliness proclaiming that 2004 is the year of the greatest outpouring of God's glory and supernatural visitation. It would be, she said, Benny Hinn's "best year" (*This Is Your Day*, Jan. 6, 2004). Hinn's 2004 campaigns were nothing more than carbon copies of previous years' shows. Heaven is not earth, as Romans 8 makes very clear. Sanctification is not glorification, no matter how often these evangelists proclaim it.

Hinn is also trying hard to get people to buy the message of restorationism and that spiritual utopia is on its way. Within a few weeks of Paula White's prophecy, Hinn featured Kenneth Copeland on his broadcast with, more or less, the same message: 2004 — The Year of Fullness. Signs, wonders, and miracles are all on their way. "2004 will be the fullest year of your life," Copeland said. The skewing of salvation, sanctification, and glorification is spiritually criminal, but these purveyors of fantasy continue to get away with it.

If we can just hold on another year, these prophets will usher in a brave new world filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. And, yes, don't forget to send money. Copeland prophesies that the "overflow" coming in 2005 "depends on how much you sow toward it in 2004" (*This Is Your Day*, Jan. 28, 2004).

Dutch Sheets' claim that by praying in each state in the United States he can singlehandedly shift each region into God's purpose is a lie out of his wild imagination (*Charisma*, February 2004, pg. 16).

C. Peter Wagner is considered a top demon chaser and modern day apostle by many Charismatics. Because he has asserted that he is among modern apostles and prophets, similar to the original twelve, even the Assemblies of God have turned their back on him. For all Wagner's bluster about his power of healing and demon busting, *Charisma* magazine revealed that Wagner has diabetes and his wife has debilitating arthritis (February 2004, pg. 52). He is a lousy poster boy for his message.

It can be argued that many of the extremist healer types have imagined themselves to be something they are not. They then become what they have imagined and actually believe themselves to be what they have created in their fantasies. Anyone can make unverifiable claims of shifting the powers in unseen realms, or of being an apostle.

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres made an interesting comment on the difference between the way Arabs use words and the Israelis use them. His observation equally applies perfectly to true Bible students and televangelists, "The role of the word in the Arab world is

different from its role in our world. For us a word is a commitment, for them it is an ornament" (cited in *Arafat's War*, pg. 125).

Even Moody Bible College is getting in on the act. Last January, college president Joseph Stowell sent a letter to Moody supporters promoting the appearance of Henry Blackaby at its Founder's Week saying, "Henry Blackaby initiated one of the most significant spiritual awakenings in recent times with 'Experiencing God.'" Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Fla., was making that same claim for its "revival" meetings a few years prior — as were others before that.

A look at the moral and spiritual state of our country, and even the Church, will lead most to the conclusion that Stowell is either naive or disingenuous. The top echelons of the Christian world get materially richer while the grassroots get spiritually poorer. The average Christian has become a casualty for the top dogs and their marketers.

One healer, one event, one apostle, one orchestrated revival, one or even two outlandishly unsupported claims will not complete life's puzzle for us. Think of someone in heaven proudly saying, "I did '40 Days of Purpose'" and Moses saying, "I did 40 years of purpose." Any program is only a tiny piece of life, a passing thing, a blip on life's radar screen.

Then think of another saying with pride, "I prayed the prayer of Jabez!" and Jesus stepping up and saying, "Yes, and I did bloody sweats in a garden. And, oh, I did the cross."

Another says, "I paid \$100 for a *Benny Hinn Bible*, did all the Blackaby seminars, and devoured a whole shelf of Watchman Nee books" and Isaiah answered, "I was sawn in two."

Some programs help us make turns and adjustments and may be good, but they only turn us toward new areas of growth and achievement. Unfortunately, their marketers often overstate their value.

Others are into what can be labeled "celebrity-by-contact." They believe it really matters whose meeting one attends. Another might say, "Hey there, I went to a Promise Keepers meeting and sat in a stadium in the hot sun. I even stood in a bathroom line next to Coach McCartney." Paul would say, "I really didn't know anybody famous except Jesus. I was stoned and beaten over the years and toward the end I still believed I had a way to go and so I pressed on and finished my course."

Many boasted — and may have even paid for — a picture with Jim and Tammy Bakker or Jimmy Swaggart. Some may now want to burn even the negatives. Jerry Falwell has sold opportunities to be photographed with him for \$10. Falwell also has hawked credit cards that would return a cash award to his school. Many in his community see him as a businessman who preaches on Sunday.

Just to show how sinful and perverted people can be, and how far they can take celebrity status, we only need look back to the Middle Ages to the concept of beneficent contagion. The idea was that if some people had extreme holiness and the powers of healing, these attributes never left them, even when they died. Somehow the “powers” still resided in their dead carcass. If others could then get near their moldering bodies they could be affected and somehow tap into, or draw off the imagined miracle residue. Even standing by the grave or tomb, or touching shreds of old clothes or pieces of the dead body (called relics), was enough.

As ghastly, ghoulish, and ghostly as beneficent contagion sounds, some Roman Catholics, as well as Benny Hinn, Jewish sects, and Muslim fundamentalists are still great believers in carcass contagion. Visitations to graves have merit in their view.

Some would give a fortune just to be flailed by Benny Hinn’s suit jacket, yet would laugh at a Roman Catholic seeking a papal blessing. Even “Protestant Popes” are all leaking umbrellas at best.

If some of the Christian “celebrities” help us at all by chance, or in some tiny way teach us something, it is only because they happened to use the Word and provided only a very tiny piece of a very big puzzle.

Red notebooks, fads, rallies, video feeds, and big name speakers do not make mature Christians. A life of struggle, obedience, and consistency only barely begins to qualify a believer for his “stripes” or rewards. We need to brush off Luke 17:10, “So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”

Yes, good books and good authors can help us for small areas of our life and may help to contribute a few pieces to our puzzle. Consistent Bible study keeps adding even more pieces — or allows the existing pieces to come together more readily. As life cycles and changes, and the years roll on, new biblical portions must be put into place.

One can read the book of Acts and wrongly think that Paul’s life was one series of spiritual highlights occurring at breakneck speed. However, Acts chronicles Paul’s life from the standpoint of some of the events with no report of the time spans between these events. Paul spent two years in a Caesarea prison with nothing recorded. He spent months on the sea traveling from place to place. Many of those days had to be dull, boring, and mundane with perhaps seasickness thrown into the mix. Second Corinthians is a glimpse into the awful disheartened states of Paul. Additionally, the Psalms are down-to-earth, revealing David’s roller-coaster days.

Life is not just one big event. Every event is just a tiny puzzle piece. The bigger pieces may well be those days when we gutted it out, obeyed, and demonstrated fruit of the Spirit — even in mundane places.

The word “revival” is used only twice in the New Testament; once of sin being revived and the other of the physical body of Jesus being revived. Revivals are hyped all the time, yet never were commanded by Jesus and the Apostles.

Jesus commanded a discipleship model of the Christian life (Matthew 28:16-20), not a revivalistic model. If God is pleased to sovereignly heighten the process and give more converts and disciples, it just means we disciple more vigorously. Revival is God’s business, not ours. Discipleship is our paradigm and pursuit. Revival is a word that is worthless to describe or define anything. Things forbidden by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14 are passed off as revival when the inspired Apostle calls them madness.

Iain Murray in *Pentecost-Today?* warns:

“If we suppose that blessing on the scale of revival is the *only* blessing worth looking for, and if we pass over the normal out of desire to see the extraordinary, we are wrong and will be disappointed. Sometimes Christians who have been through revivals have fallen into just such disappointment. They were tempted to think that there could be no real happiness unless times of revival continued. ... The authenticity of any alleged revival is to be judged by the *same* tests by which the genuineness of all Christianity is to be tested. ... revivals consist of *more* of what Christians already possess” (pp. 29, 31, italics in original).

Instead of tending to discipleship and faithfulness day by day, some try to “make things happen,” and when it does not happen they fall into despair and despise the normal. Discipleship is denigrated.

Do not listen to the cults or televangelists who say that life should be one constant event or spiritual high. Don’t despise the normal and ordinary, since God works in those. Don’t despise the means of grace as they are major pieces of life’s puzzle. Discipleship is a puzzle-making process. Don’t believe that a self-proclaimed miracle worker will bring heaven on earth this year or any year soon. It will take Jesus to fit in the last pieces of a big puzzle.

Review the words of J.C. Ryle from his book *Holiness*:

“At our best we shall find in ourselves daily cause for humiliation, and discover that we are needy debtors to mercy and grace every hour. The more light we have, the more we shall see our own imperfection. Sinners we were when we began, sinners we shall find ourselves as we go; renewed, pardoned, justified — yet sinners to the very last. Our absolute perfection is yet to come, and the expectation of it is one reason why we should long for heaven” (pg. 32).

Remember the puzzle.

—GRF